

Infatuation or Love?

What is love, and what is infatuation? Do you think you know? Before you assume you're in love, you should be sure you know what it is!

by Tim Waddle



It was the first day of classes my senior year in college. I walked into a computer class and looked around for a familiar face. As I quickly scanned the room, I noticed a couple of my friends, but I also noticed a beautiful brunette with deep dark eyes, and an empty seat next to her.

Our eyes met briefly, and I noticed a sweet smile come across her face. That was all the invitation I needed. Valerie and I started dating shortly after that first day of class together, and we were married almost one year later to the day. That was 16 years ago.

Was this love at first sight? Are we part of the lucky few who met their "soul mate"? Did we fall in love when our eyes met?



Wanting to love and be loved is very normal and healthy. Many of us grow up watching movies, listening to songs and reading books where the heroes "fall" in love and live happily ever after. This is what we desire in our own lives. Not only do the movies, songs and books deceive us into believing that we should *fall* in love, but our own brains can fool us as well.

When someone we think is attractive notices us, our brains release chemicals that make us feel good. Many confuse these feelings with love. But is this really love? Many people believe it is love, and they continue to *fall* in and out of love as these feelings come and go.

An article titled "Love Is the Drug" claims that passionate or romantic love is like a drug in the human brain. "That's exactly what a team of scientists is discovering as they watch new love literally blaze its trail across the living brain. Using real-time MRI brain images of people in the initial throes of passion, they're finding that love originates far from the brain's logic center" (*HealthDay News*, June 10, 2005).

"In fact, love may vie for the same real estate in the brain as drug addiction. 'There's this general craving-and-desire system that's engaged, only in this case the desire isn't for money or a drug or power or freedom. The desire is for merging with another person,' explained co-researcher Arthur Aron, a professor of psychology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook" (ibid.).

Dopamine + serotonin = infatuation

Scientists seemingly confuse these feelings with love. Could we do the same?

Other studies have shown that when we meet someone we find attractive, the human brain's neurotransmitters, dopamine and serotonin, kick in.

"In the right proportions, dopamine creates intense energy, exhilaration, focused attention and motivation to win rewards" ("Love: The Chemical Reaction," *National Geographic*, February 2006). At the same time we develop a serotonin imbalance similar to people who have

obsessive-compulsive disorder. The article goes on to say, "Love and mental illness may be difficult to tell apart."

This is how strong the emotions and feelings can be! *Emotional chemistry, passionate love, romantic love* or *love sickness* are all terms people use to describe the new and exciting feelings of attraction. But one word can sum it up— *infatuation*. A huge aspect of having a successful loving and lasting relationship is recognizing what infatuation is and recognizing that true love is not infatuation.

According to WordNet online dictionary, infatuation is a "foolish and usually extravagant passion or love or admiration; temporary love of an adolescent" or "an object of extravagant short-lived passion."

Notice that lasting love is not part of the definition. The emotions change, the feelings are lost over time and those susceptible to infatuation "fall out of love" and begin the search for those feelings, which they think constitute love, all over again.

True love

I mentioned earlier the influence that movies, songs and books can have on our perception of love. At least one love song I know gets it right. On his album *Nothin' but the Taillights*, country artist Clint Black recorded a love song titled "Something That We Do." Here is one verse from this song:

*I remember well the day we wed
I can see that picture in my head
Love isn't just those words we said
It's something that we do
There's no request too big or small
We give ourselves, we give our all
Love isn't someplace that we fall
It's something that we do*

I like this song because his emphasis isn't on falling in love, but recognizing that love is much more than a feeling. Love may very well start with feelings, but it must become something we do, not just something we feel or something we get.

In Greek, the language of the New Testament, there are three words for "love." One is *eros*, which refers to a romantic or sexual love. Another is *philia*, which means brotherly love or friendship. And the third is *agape*, a broader word used to describe God's outflowing love.

A good marriage will have all three kinds of love. Romance and romantic feelings are good and should be a part of a healthy marriage. But a relationship should not be based just on romantic feelings. Friendship and companionship with good communication are also part of a healthy marriage.

But true love goes beyond friendship. True love will have and demonstrate outflowing, caring love. This is the type of love that God expresses toward mankind. It is the kind of love that is listed as part of the fruit of His Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

This kind of love takes time to develop. It goes beyond feelings and emotions. This true love or outgoing concern means being willing to set aside our own desires in order to provide for the needs of the other and to give of ourselves even when the dopamine and serotonin have settled

down and we are back to reality.

Again, it takes time for real love to grow. It doesn't happen at first sight. It doesn't happen only if or when we find a soul mate, and it is not something we fall into.

Notice what the apostle Paul says about true love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

This is outgoing love. Notice that this love does not seek its own. This means not focusing on self nor on what you can get out of a relationship, but on what you have to give and contribute to a relationship.

How true love develops

This type of love is best developed by first establishing a lasting relationship with God, and then by striving to be more like Him. Once you have a relationship with God, ask Him to be involved in your love life. Ask God to help you develop godly love that you can share in the right way at the right time with another human being. Focus on what you have to offer to someone else, instead of what you can get from a relationship.

The feelings are the easy part. The feelings will come and the feelings will go. Will you recognize them for what they are? Will you mistake emotions and feelings for true love? If you do, when the feelings wear off you'll fall out of love and have to start looking to fall in love again.

Valerie and I had those feelings for each other over 16 years ago, but we did not allow them to dictate our actions. We got to know each other, and with God's help we developed love for one another. We still have those feelings. We still have love for one another, and we still have God involved in our relationship.

Emotional chemistry may be the start of a lasting relationship, but if it's lasting love you want, it's important to recognize what infatuation is and what love is. They are not the same, even if your brain tells you they are. *VT*

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